

INTELLIGENCE AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS  
IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Still, Washington's military performance in the late 1750s with British-Colonial forces around what is now Pittsburgh promised little of the leadership and insights he was to demonstrate 20 years later. Still, he garnered more military experience than all but a handful of the colonial leaders on hand when the shooting started and the disasters he encountered in the west in service under the British generals Braddock and Forbes are likely to have contributed to the military prudence he demonstrated and value he placed on intelligence in his conduct of the war of the Revolution.

Perhaps more important, there is some evidence that these early experiences led Washington to read and think a lot about the art of war during the intervening 20 years. In his library or among books he recommended to his officers were three French military works: Count de Crisse's Essay on the Art of War, dealing heavily in spies and intelligence, DeJeney's The Partisan, dealing with the use of small detachments to reconnoiter, hit outposts, ambush convoys, exploit surprise and harassment of the enemy, what the French then called "Petete Guerre," and Marshal Saxe's Reviews or Memories on the Art of War. These works appeared in English during the 1760s with analysis and advice still sound today in the practice of intelligence and conduct of guerrilla tactics and operations such as those of the American Revolution and other little wars down to Vietnam and Afghanistan.

The intelligence process consists of three broad steps--the collection which is the identification and collection of the information relevant to planning decision, production which is the evaluation and analysis of information drawing inferences and conclusions from it and relating it to planning and decision, and dissemination which is conveying facts and conclusions to commanders and policymakers needing them.

It is no exaggeration that Washington himself performed all of these functions. In his letters time and again he specifies and pleads for the kind of information he needs to \_\_\_\_\_ the enemy's plans and intentions. The analysis and interpretation of the facts collected for him takes place in his own mind and his massive correspondence was a major means of conveying relevant information to his commanders and the Congress.

Here is an example of the detail in which Washington specified to his agents in British-occupied New York the facts he expected them to collect for him.

"How their transports are secured against an attempt to destroy them--whether by armed vessels upon the flanks, or by chains, Booms, or any contrivances to keep off fire Rafts.

"The number of men destined for the defense of the City and Environs, endeavoring to designate the particular corps, and where each is posted.

"To be particular in describing the place where the works cross the Island in the Rear of the City--how many Redoubts are upon the line from River to River, how many Cannon in each, and of what weight and whether the Redoubts are closed or open next the city.

"Whether there are any Works upon the Island of New York between those near the City and the works at Fort Knyphausen or Washington, and if any, whereabouts and of what kind.

"To be very particular in finding out whether any works are thrown up on Harlem River, near Harlem Town, and whether Horn's Hook is fortified. If so, how many men are kept at each place, and what number and what sized Cannon are in those works.

"To enquire whether they have dug Pits within and in front of the lines and Works in general, three or four feet deep, in which sharp pointed stakes are fixed. These are intended to receive and wound men who attempt a surprise at night.

"The state of the provisions, Forage and Fuel to be attended to, as also the Health and Spirits of the Army, Navy and City."